

Transcript of Dr. Khan's Talk
Sunday July 1, 2001
Kingdom Conference in Milwaukee, WI
Tape KCM - Day 4 Program 1

Bill Davis: You know when your heart's full its hard to make space for more. But more to come. In this session it's titled, What is My Spiritual Mission, we've asked Dr. Peter Khan, member of the Universal House of Justice to address us on our spiritual mission. Would you welcome Dr. Peter Khan, please? [applause]

Dr. Khan: Dear Friends, if you have come here seeking a life of comfort and relaxation, seeking a life devoted as are those of so many around us, a life devoted to the endless pursuit of pleasure, this is not the conference for you. [applause] But if instead you have come here, seeking and ardently desiring to find a means of fulfilling your true purpose in life then this is the conference for you. [applause] And if you're yearning is for a true and abiding happiness, far beyond that attainable through the accumulation of material possessions, you are in the right place. [applause] If you believe that we human beings are more than material, that we are spiritual, that we are spiritual beings with a spiritual dimension, with an aim for spiritual development, this is your conference. [applause] And knowing that the days of our lives pass very, very swiftly, if we seek to reach the end of our days, warmed and nurtured by the satisfaction of feeling that we are approaching the transition of our lives with a sense of having contributed to the betterment of the welfare of humanity than this is your conference. [applause]

The sessions which have been held here, and particularly of course the magnificent presentation by the National Spiritual Assembly yesterday on the details of the Five Year Plan, these sessions have renewed our sense of purpose, have reminded us of what we are about, why we are here and have called us to a renewed commitment to the vital tasks and responsibilities set before us. We have been summoned, we have been summoned to carry out the work of the Five Year Plan, to advance the processes of entry by troops of people into the Cause of God, and we are summoned to carry these out within the

Transcript of Dr. Khan's Talk
Sunday July 1, 2001
Kingdom Conference in Milwaukee, WI
Tape KCM - Day 4 Program 1

framework of the fulfillment of the promises of millennia, and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on Earth.

Our mission is three-fold. It is simultaneously to build, each one, within ourselves the beautiful, the shining edifice of spiritual development. To perfect our characters, to refine our conduct, to nurture our sense of devotion to God, to build within ourselves the spiritual development which is the Kingdom within us. We are summoned also to develop Bahá'í communities in all parts of this land which reflect the spiritual values of the Kingdom, its love, its unity, its animation, its dynamism and its creativity. And beyond that we are called upon to expand and extend the reach of the Bahá'í community to embrace the peoples of the United States and beyond them the mass of the people of the world. This is our mission. This is our responsibility. This is our role. This is why we were created. This is the best thing we can do with the remainder of our lives.

[applause]

I want to comment this morning on three aspects of our spiritual mission. My purpose is not to attempt a complete treatment on this subject. We have heard many wonderful things from the members of the National Spiritual Assembly. We have been inspired by the Counselors present. Their remarks have lifted our vision. I want to simply add some supplementary comments along these lines.

In the first item I want to talk about is the concept of teaching the Faith. I raise this point because it appears to me that in this country, as well as in other parts of the world, the concept of devoting oneself to the spread of a religion has been someone debased. We are familiar, those of us who have read contemporary American history, we are familiar with the remarkable events of Aimee Semple McPherson. Those who have read

Transcript of Dr. Khan's Talk
Sunday July 1, 2001
Kingdom Conference in Milwaukee, WI
Tape KCM - Day 4 Program 1

American novels have gloried in the pursuits of Elmer Gantry and Guys and Dolls and other books which have been written about such individuals. Turn on the television late at night and you have television evangelists who are presenting the spread of their message in a very unique and picturesque way. We have the record of Jim Jones and all the things that happened in Guyana, the record of the Waco debacle. And the other events of contemporary American history which must surely make us weary of any call to spread a religion.

So often the commitment to spread of religion is associated with concepts which any reasonable person must find debased. Associated with high-pressure salesmanship of the worst kind. Salesmanship is to my mind an honorable profession. I speak not of the profession of salesmanship, but of its perversion, in the high-pressure tactics which are so often grafted on to the spread of religion. Religious spread and teaching is so often influenced by coercion. Coercion through guilt, through the application of psychological pressure, through the use of ridicule and humiliation.

When one analyzes a variety of approaches current in our society today to the spread of religion, they can be reduced to a subtle form of bribery. And so often the spread of religion can be found to have at its heart charismatic individuals who seek to enroll subservient individuals who will blindly follow them into the nethermost fire. It is for this reason that one might legitimately approach the call to commit oneself to teaching the Bahá'í Faith with a certain degree of reluctance and weariness. And I want to assure you that the Bahá'í approach to the spread of this religion has nothing, whatsoever in common, with those debased and perverse ideas. [applause]

Our approach when we speak of teaching the Faith, our approach is that of offering to

Transcript of Dr. Khan's Talk
Sunday July 1, 2001
Kingdom Conference in Milwaukee, WI
Tape KCM - Day 4 Program 1

those around us in a spirit of humility, something which we sincerely believe is immensely beneficial, will transform the lives of those who want to accept it, and which will bring healing and comfort to their hearts. We do not hesitate to share with friends, acquaintances and even strangers news of a new restaurant which has a novel cuisine. We do not hesitate to tell others about a new form of alternative therapy which seems to bring healing in a magical way. We do not hesitate to proclaim the benefits of new medicines that appear on the market, whether it's zinc cream or certain ointments or things that will stop you catching cold. We have no inhibition about sharing with friends, relatives and even perfect strangers in the street, the news of something beneficial to them at that relatively mundane level. If there is no inhibition in this regard, why is it that we should feel an inhibition about sharing with people who are manifestly in a condition of suffering, of yearning, and indeed of spiritual oppression, sharing with them the wonderful message which we know will transform their lives. [applause]

There is a passage in the Kitáb-i-Íqán where Bahá'u'lláh speaks of oppression. And He refers to this present day as a time of great oppression. And my paraphrase of His words, is that He says in that place, what greater oppression can there be than an individual wishing to find the truth and not knowing where to find it. It is in this sense that we live in a society where oppression is manifest. Not in a physical form. Not in the form of military or psychological repression. But because we are surrounded by people who yearn as desperately as we do, for truth, for harmony, for healing, for unity and peace and do not know where to find it. In that sense how can we remain silent. [applause]

Our approach to teaching the Faith is along the lines set out in our sacred Writings and applied by the institutions of the Faith, by their National Teaching Committees and their Regional Bahá'í Councils. Our method is designed to preserve the dignity of the

Transcript of Dr. Khan's Talk
Sunday July 1, 2001
Kingdom Conference in Milwaukee, WI
Tape KCM - Day 4 Program 1

individual and to respect his or her rights. We do not use psychological pressure, coercion or subtle forms of bribery. Our spread of our religion is animated by our commitment to the oneness of humankind. Our respect for human rights requires us to offer our teachings within the spirit of dignity and freedom. [applause] Our approach to the spread of our Faith is rooted in our commitment to mysterious spiritual forces. We rely upon them. We are told that if we just make the effort, great spiritual forces rush to our aid. If we offer the sacred text, these words have a mysterious effect on the hearer. We rely not on admonition, but rather on the power of example. And this is what will carry us through. If the Five Year Plan calls, as it does, for the expansion of the numerical size of the Bahá'í community, it will be accomplished principally by the power of illuminated example far more than by what we might say and what we might wish others to do. I turn now to the second of the three points on which I wish to make some comments. And that concerns an element which has been mentioned by the, or referred to I think, by the Chairman of the National Spiritual Assembly in his remarks a few minutes ago. And that is the question of sacrifice. It was implicit also in the remarks of Counselor Murphy. What we are aiming to accomplish in these years ahead is not going to be easy. It's going to be difficult. It's not going to be accomplished, simply by devoting to it those resources of time and money which are superfluous. I have nothing to do tonight, okay maybe I'll do some Bahá'í activities. This little bit of money is left over at the end of the month, I have no particular need for it, fine I'll devote it to the service of the Faith. That's not going to do it. What is called for, and let us not delude ourselves, what is called for in the Five Year Plan is real life sacrifice. Giving up things that we like to do. Sacrificing certain things which bring us pleasure for the higher pleasures. What we are called upon to do in the Five Year Plan is to set our way of life apart to some extent from that of the people around us.

Transcript of Dr. Khan's Talk
Sunday July 1, 2001
Kingdom Conference in Milwaukee, WI
Tape KCM - Day 4 Program 1

We're not called upon to reject the society of which we are a part. But we're called upon to adopt a new and heroic style of life, which is animated by a variety of principles, one of which is that of sacrifice. Our world view is beyond the materialistic world view prevalent in the society around us. We recognize the existence of the material world. We comprehend the material forces that work in the world, we accept the material component of our existence. It is legitimate. It is part of God's creation. But if our model of the world is entirely a material one, then the voluntary sacrifice of time and resources does not make a great deal of sense. And we will do it in an uncomfortable matter, in a somewhat superfluous way without any genuine commitment. What we need is to acquire a model within us, a model of the world, as representing the interaction of material and spiritual forces. A model of the world, which recognizes that we are beyond the material. That we are essentially spiritual beings residing temporarily in a material world, before moving on to other realms of the eternity of creation. And if we are animated by that deep and profound understanding of the spiritual dimension of our lives, then sacrifice will be to us a joy and a pleasure and a means to a higher and a deeper happiness and satisfaction. [applause]

The third of the points that I wanted to spend a few minutes on is a difficult and unpopular, and indeed unpleasant question of persistence of efforts. One feels somewhat like the Grinch that stole Christmas. In a wonderful conference like this where we are all so excited, so happy, so pleased. So yearning to go out and teach the poor policeman out there on the crossing and so on. When we are so filled with the spirit it seems a rather killjoy attitude to speak of persistence of efforts. What do you mean persistence of efforts? I'm ready to die for the Faith. I'm going to go home and work for it for 24 hours a day. Watch me, see what I do. Why is it that you, sitting sourly in the corner, raising the point of persistence of efforts? [laughter] I do so because unlike Bill Davis, I'm not

Transcript of Dr. Khan's Talk
Sunday July 1, 2001
Kingdom Conference in Milwaukee, WI
Tape KCM - Day 4 Program 1

six years old. [laughter and applause] I do so because I have observed myself, my weaknesses, my failings and my inadequacies over an alarming number of decades. And I realize that the core of Building the Kingdom is the process of internal, spiritual development. I see this as a noble objective, I see it as wonderful and as illuminating. But when I look deep in the murky recesses of my material nature, I find that novelty tends to wear off. I find in my experience that the process of spiritual development is essentially a solitary pursuit, even if one is in the company of others engaged in similar activity. We can encourage each other. We can support each other. We can be very nice to each other. But, essentially the process of refining one's character, of conforming to adherence to the laws of the Faith, of cultivating the practice of prayer, meditation, and regular reading of the sacred Texts. These are essentially solitary pursuits and as such, one must combat the feelings of loneliness and discouragement which are an inherent part of any solitary pursuit. So I raise for your consideration that the challenge is not today, not even next week. The challenge is to be examined on the first of August, the 1st of September, and the 1st of October and so on. As the months go by, as the memories of this wonderful conference find their place within our consciousness, the challenge before us is that of the persistence of efforts.

Much has been said here about the Bahá'í community and everything I have heard is true. The Bahá'í community is a new creation. It is, as I mentioned a couple days ago, a remarkable act of creation on the part of Bahá'u'lláh. A new step in human social evolution, the creation of organic units. These organic units, local, national and international will expand, evolve, develop, acquire remarkable new capacities in decades, centuries and perhaps even millennia ahead. We are embarked on the most exciting adventure in human social history. And our Bahá'í communities are wonderful creations with even greater potential.

Transcript of Dr. Khan's Talk
Sunday July 1, 2001
Kingdom Conference in Milwaukee, WI
Tape KCM - Day 4 Program 1

But, what is required in the development of the Bahá'í community is the learning of new patterns of behavior, of new habits of action, of new forms of interaction and social relationship. And let us not pretend that Bahá'í community life is always easy. Let us be realistic about the fact that there are difficulties and disappointments in the process of Bahá'í community life. Let us... [applause] Those who would participate in Bahá'í community activities will find, at some times, themselves, disappointed. At times they will feel hurt. At times they might even feel disillusioned and say 'Where are all these wonderful things of which you speak?' The organic unit, the spiritual power, the light. All I experience is frustration and disillusionment at these people and their inadequacy and the things they do and don't do. Bahá'í community life is a radical change in human, social behavior. We have to unlearn the pattern of 6,000 years. It is not going to happen overnight. It's not going to happen without a great deal of very, very hard effort. It is in that sense that I associated with the challenge to the persistence of efforts over the months and years ahead. [applause]

I have mentioned earlier that what is required of us is a renewal of the spirit of heroism. Because what is required for us in building the Kingdom of God on Earth is that we dare to be different. We find the courage to strike off in a part which, to some extent, differs from that of the people around us, because of our sense of mission. Because of our realization of the responsibilities we have voluntarily assumed as members of the Bahá'í community. What this means is that somewhere along the line, people around us will to some extent offer us ridicule. Will want to misrepresent our aims and objectives. Will regard us with alarm, because of our sense of mission, our commitment, our dedication to the creation of a new world. Some will welcome us with open arms. Some will be alarmed. Some will seek to divert us from our high objective. We'll be subject to the

Transcript of Dr. Khan's Talk
Sunday July 1, 2001
Kingdom Conference in Milwaukee, WI
Tape KCM - Day 4 Program 1

inertia of those around us, who want to pull us back into the endless pursuit of mindless pleasure. We have to deal with that. We have to be strong. We have to be courageous. We have to be determined. There may even be some who maliciously seek to sow seeds of doubt within our minds. To create tests to our belief. To try to inject a materialistic perspective on our activities, on our motives and actions of our administrators. All of these are part and parcel of what we must realistically expect within the context of the persistence of efforts in the months and years ahead.

And what can we do about it? How can we find that strength? How can we prepare ourselves to deal with the challenge of persistence of efforts? We have before us the ever applicable words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He says "The Almighty will no doubt grant you the help of His grace, will invest you with the tokens of His might and will endue souls with the sustaining power of the Holy Spirit." It is a Holy Spirit that will carry us through with the persistence of efforts. Without drawing upon the Holy Spirit, we are doomed to failure. Efforts will not persist. Emotions will cool down. We will lapse into the inertia of those around us. With the power of the Holy Spirit, our persistence is assured and our victory is guaranteed. It means, therefore, that our efforts must be rooted in a continual drawing on the power of the Holy Spirit with which our Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is infused. The regular commitment to prayer, the contemplation of the sacred words, the dogged and determined commitment to participation in Bahá'í community life, sacrificial endeavor in support of the Funds of the Faith. In these and other ways, we will attract to ourselves the power of the Holy Spirit which will enable us to persist in our endeavors, despite whatever difficulties we may find ahead. [applause]

I bring my remarks now towards a conclusion. I have mentioned, as others have at this conference, the need for us to revive a sense of responsibility for the future of humanity.

Transcript of Dr. Khan's Talk
Sunday July 1, 2001
Kingdom Conference in Milwaukee, WI
Tape KCM - Day 4 Program 1

This is the distinguishing feature of the Bahá'í Faith. That our concept of the brotherhood and the sisterhood of all the peoples of the world is more than just an inspiring idea, more than just a noble ideal. The concept of our being part of a family of humanity carries with it a real, inescapable responsibility for the alleviation of suffering, of hurt and the promotion of healing. We have been told and it is certainly true that it is an integral part of our religion, that we stand at a crucial time in history. Bahá'u'lláh has brought the Revelation to inaugurate the Kingdom of God on Earth. Spiritual forces are moving throughout world events, molding the affairs of humanity toward the attainment of that end. And our personal responsibility is to align ourselves with those forces so we can pursue these high objectives.

In that context America is richly blessed. It is richly blessed. It is a country of immense resources. It has been the melting pot of peoples from all parts of the world. The American people are known for their energy, their creativity and their originality of thought. America is in a very real sense, the new world. And because it is a new world your responsibilities are correspondingly greater. Your responsibilities are to take the lead in the spread of the Faith throughout the world, to take the lead in the establishment of the Kingdom of God on Earth. You're privileged to be part of the American Bahá'í community. You are privilege to be part of the American Nation. But in offering you my admiration for that privilege, I temper it with my reminder that this privilege carries with it a responsibility far greater than that which rests upon the shoulders of the people of any other country in the world. [applause] In the years ahead it will be to the United States that the people of the world will look. It will be to the United States Bahá'í community that other Bahá'ís in the rest of the world will look for leadership, for example, for a spirit of commitment and sacrifice which will animate and inform their activities.

Transcript of Dr. Khan's Talk
Sunday July 1, 2001
Kingdom Conference in Milwaukee, WI
Tape KCM - Day 4 Program 1

It is in that sense that my closing remarks are those to draw once again your attention to the wonder, the magnificence, the nobility of your purpose and mission. And I close by drawing to your attention, these few words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, which summarize my theme. And I want to encourage you to, to the extent possible, remember these words. Let them be your source of encouragement and vision in the months and years ahead. May you remind yourselves of them from time to time as you renew your vision, as you rededicate yourselves to the great work which lies before you. And it is with these words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá that I now conclude. Exert yourselves; your mission is unspeakably glorious. Should success crown your enterprise, America will assuredly evolve into a center from which waves of spiritual power will emanate, and the throne of the Kingdom of God will, in the plenitude of its majesty and glory, the throne of the Kingdom of God will be firmly established. Thank you. [applause]